



# The Power of Partnerships

Successes and Program Highlights

JULY 2016-DECEMBER 2017



# BETTER TOGETHER: MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER ANDREA MACKENZIE

*"We come and go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it — for a little while."*

WILLA CATHER

At the Open Space Authority, our love and understanding of the Santa Clara Valley – with its sweeping views, oak woodlands, grasslands, rare species, bubbling creeks, and working farms – is what inspires us to ensure that future generations will have open space to love.

When the Authority was created in 1993, our small agency joined a legion of nonprofit and public agencies dedicated to protecting the remarkable natural resources and open spaces here in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Over the past 25 years, the Authority has emerged as a leader in this community, focused on our mission of balancing the Valley's growth and development by protecting open spaces, water resources, wildlife habitat, and working lands.

This year more than ever, our successes were possible because of our alliances with others with



whom we share a vision.

By finding where our goals align with those of others, we have targeted projects where we can work together, becoming both more efficient and more effective.

For example, in the past year, we initiated a collaboration with the Santa Clara Valley Water District to identify places in the Coyote Valley we can protect and restore for enhanced water resource management and flood risk reduction, benefitting both of our agencies and our community.

We also worked closely with the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency to create a grazing and resource

management strategy for Coyote Ridge Open Space Preserve and support the development of a Resource Conservation Investment Strategy.

Of course, we also worked with many other organizations, agencies, cities, funders, and residents throughout the Valley. This report highlights some of our partnerships and programs from July 2016 – December 2017. Together, we have protected open space, connected wildlife habitat, restored farmland and floodplains, and improved public access to open space and outdoor education – even in our cities.

The Open Space Authority was honored in 2017 as the first public agency in the nation to receive accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance, a national land conservation organization. The accreditation recognizes the Authority's commitment to professional excellence and best practices for long-term protection of land and its conservation values.

As I write this, we are in the midst of a year of celebrations for our 25th anniversary. With the help of all of our partners over the past 25

years, the Authority has protected more than 22,000 acres of open space, natural areas, watershed, and wildlife habitat – preserving the beauty and environmental health of the Valley while providing opportunities for outdoor recreation and environmental education.

As we celebrate our successes, we are always looking to the future. Guided by our visionary plans and initiatives like the [Coyote Valley Landscape Linkage](#), [Santa Clara Valley Greenprint](#), [Healthy Lands & Healthy Economies](#), and the [Regional Conservation Investment Strategy](#), we will continue to make strategic conservation investments that benefit communities and a sustainable, resilient region.

We will also find new ways to work with our partners to meet the environmental challenges posed by population growth, development pressures, and a changing climate. Together, we will continue to explore, learn about, and protect the natural and working lands that are the life support system for our cities, communities, and economy.

*Andrea Mackenzie*

# YEAR AT A GLANCE

Residents we serve

**1.4**  
MILLION

**80<sup>+</sup>**

Organizations we partner with for conservation

Acres preserved by the Authority and through partnerships

**2,995**

**4** Public open space preserves



Annual visitors



**200,000<sup>+</sup>**



**\$2,333,765**

Urban Open Space grants awarded

**11,000<sup>+</sup>**

Participants in environmental education programs

Active Volunteers

**700<sup>+</sup>**



**\$13,264,936**

Conservation investments leveraged through partnerships



# Preserving Open Space

At the core of the Open Space Authority's mission is protecting the scenic landscapes, working agricultural lands, and wildlife habitat that make the Santa Clara Valley so special.

Recent strategic acquisitions by the Open Space Authority are helping to protect and restore natural landscapes, honor the Valley's rich agricultural history, and improve access to open space.





### **Wildlife connections and wetlands: Fisher's Bend and Fisher Flats**

Two recent purchases in the Fisher Creek floodplain connect habitat for wildlife in Coyote Valley and will allow us to restore wetlands.

This year, our partners at Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) acquired the 63-acre Fisher's Bend, a property farmed for more than six decades. The Authority will eventually assume ownership of the property and add it to the Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve, restoring and expanding rare wet meadows and riparian habitat for California tiger salamander and other wildlife.

Also on Fisher Creek, POST purchased the 30-acre Fisher Flats property, just south of San Jose. This parcel, at the confluence of Fisher and Coyote Creeks, is key to connecting habitats and providing wildlife passage across the Valley.

These acquisitions are located in North and Mid-Coyote Valley, critical areas identified in the *Coyote Valley Landscape Linkage* report, which aims to restore a historic wetland complex and connect 1.3 million acres of open space in the Santa Cruz and Diablo Mountain Ranges. POST purchased these 93 acres for \$8.7 million and we will be working closely with them to transfer the properties to the Authority to become part of Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve.



**Farming, flood protection,  
and creekside habitat:  
North Pajaro River  
Agricultural Preserve**

This historically productive farmland south of Gilroy is an important part of the Valley's working landscape. Because it is located next to the Pajaro River, a critical wildlife corridor, this land was one of our top priorities for protection.

With a grant from the Pajaro River Watershed Flood Prevention Authority, we purchased 100 acres to add to the 184 acres already preserved. We've leased the new preserve to local farmers, who will continue to keep the land in agricultural production.

- Preserved: 100 acres
- Partner: Pajaro River Watershed Flood Prevention Authority
- Transaction and pre-acquisition cost: \$1,882,500 (100% grant funded)

## Local trail connections: El Toro

Working in partnership with the City of Morgan Hill, the Authority made a small but pivotal purchase to improve local residents' access to local open space. We used Measure Q funds to acquire 6.6 acres at the base of the iconic El Toro Peak, and our volunteers have replaced the old fences with wildlife-friendly fencing.

The end result will be a long-desired public trail that lets locals connect with nature – including panoramic views of Coast Live Oak, California Bay woodlands, chaparral, and stunning grasslands.

- Purchased and improved: 6.6 acres
- Partner: City of Morgan Hill
- Acquisition cost (Open Space Authority and City of Morgan Hill): \$1,530,000

**MEASURE**   
INVESTING IN NATURE



Land Stewards volunteer at El Toro



Santa Teresa Foothills, 2017

## Hillside views and habitat: Santa Teresa Foothills

The unique rock outcroppings of the Santa Teresa Foothills – and the former Greystone Quarry site – perch just above the suburbs of San Jose. The Pfeiffer family, longtime owners of the land, sold the land to the Authority to preserve their family’s legacy and protect the undeveloped hillside in perpetuity.



Santa Teresa Foothills, 1920

The site provides outstanding views across the Almaden Valley towards Mt. Umunhum and is important native habitat for several species. This Measure Q-funded purchase is the first step in an eventual network of open space and trails on the Santa Teresa Ridge.

- Purchased: 52 acres
- Partner: Pfeiffer family
- Acquisition cost: \$250,000



# Restoring Habitats

## Coyote Valley South Valley Meadow restoration

By restoring and reconnecting a section of stream and its surrounding wetland at the Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve, the Authority took another step toward reestablishing the area's historic wetland complex.

We replanted a meadow at the entrance to Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve with native species to improve wildlife habitat, enhance groundwater recharge, and reduce flood risk to downstream communities.

New interpretive signage that overlooks the South Valley Meadow offers visitors quick facts about the importance of meadow and wetland restoration and its role in climate stability and flood control.

- Restored: 8.5 acres of wetland
- Partner: Santa Clara Valley Water District
- Cost (Open Space Authority and Santa Clara Valley Water District): \$587,961

"Conserving water and protecting our groundwater resources go hand in hand with protecting open spaces and the endangered species that depend on them for survival."

Richard Santos, Board Member,  
Santa Clara Valley Water District



South Valley Meadow before



South Valley Meadow after

North Pajaro River Agricultural Preserve before



North Pajaro River Agricultural Preserve after



## North Pajaro River Agricultural Preserve cleanup and restoration

After our purchase of the 100-acre parcel along the North Pajaro River, our volunteers, partners, and staff got to work cleaning up debris and trash.

In 2017 we began long-term restoration of the property, which connects habitat along Llagas Creek and the Upper Pajaro River. A protected floodplain along the Pajaro will improve water quality and provide flood protection for downstream communities.

- Restored and cleaned up: 100 acres of streamside agricultural land
- Partners: San Jose Conservation Corps, Land Steward Volunteers
- Cost: \$176,893

## Diablo Foothills wetland restoration

As mitigation for habitat loss after a project to widen Highway 152, Caltrans approached the Open Space Authority to restore stream and wetlands at the Authority's Diablo Foothills property east of Gilroy.

Working closely with Authority staff, Caltrans constructed natural curves and swales to restore the stream's naturally slow water flow, and then planted native trees and plants. The result includes wetland habitat for rare species including the California tiger salamander.

- Restored: 13 acres of wetlands
- Partner: Caltrans
- Cost (Caltrans): \$1.65 million

# Looking to the Future: Initiatives, Plans, and Policies



## Coyote Valley Landscape Linkage

Nestled between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Diablo Range, Coyote Valley is a vital natural landscape connection between these two mountain ranges that allows wildlife to migrate, find mates, and adapt to climate change. Coyote Valley also plays a key role in protecting our water resources, providing flood protection, recharging groundwater, and contributing to a sustainable drinking water supply.

The Open Space Authority assembled a team of scientists to establish a clear vision for protecting and managing these important resources. In 2017 the Authority released the [Coyote Valley Landscape Linkage](#) report, a bold vision that will inform the future of the Valley.

The vision for the Coyote Valley as described in the report includes protecting lands in northern Coyote Valley, where the two mountain ranges are closest and the

**“We envision Coyote Valley will one day be a vibrant, vital passage for species of all types.”**

Walter Moore, President, POST

landscape is most intact. The report also identifies the importance of protecting and restoring waterways and wetlands such as Fisher Creek and Laguna Seca, which not only benefit wildlife but also reduce flood risk and recharge groundwater.

Using data on movement of bobcat and other key species, the team mapped critical locations for road crossings, such as culverts and bridges, to improve safety for both wildlife and drivers.

Coyote Valley is the last, best opportunity we have to protect this critical wildlife connection and our water resources. We are now leading a collaborative effort to implement the conservation recommendations in the report, to ensure a resilient future for Coyote Valley and all who depend upon it.

**Partners: California Department of Fish and Wildlife, CalTrans, City of San Jose, California High Speed Rail Authority, Pathways for Wildlife, Peninsula Open Space Trust, Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department, Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, Santa Clara Valley Water District, Valley Habitat Agency, Valley Transportation Authority**

## Studying bobcat and gray fox movements in Coyote Valley

Two of Coyote Valley's top predators, bobcat and gray fox, require large areas for travel. Accommodating their movement across Coyote Valley is paramount to their survival.

The Open Space Authority collaborated with partners to study how and where these animals move across the Valley. Radio-collars and cameras allowed us to identify where roads and fencing posed problems for the animals. This data helped identify where conservation, land use, and transportation planning can facilitate wildlife movement – and provide for the long-term protection of these and many other species.

- **Tracked: 22 individual bobcats**
- **Partners: California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Peninsula Open Space Trust, Valley Habitat Agency, U.C. Santa Cruz, Pathways for Wildlife**
- **Cost: \$210,130**

## Authority is first agency in the U.S. accredited for high standards

The Open Space Authority was honored in 2017 as the first public agency in the nation to receive accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance, a national land conservation organization.

**"Our staff takes pride in working collaboratively with landowners to protect our region's vital open spaces, and accreditation further signals to our landowner partners how seriously we take this work."**

**Matt Freeman, Assistant General Manager**



The accreditation, which requires an extensive evaluation, recognizes the Authority's commitment to professional excellence, fiscal accountability, ethical conduct, and lasting stewardship.

The Authority ensured that its process meets or exceeds best standards and practices, including thorough evaluation of conservation values for each property acquisition and regular monitoring of protected lands to make certain that those values are conserved forever.



## Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan

The Authority continues to take a lead role in preserving the rich agricultural history of "The Valley of Heart's Delight." This year, we helped complete the [Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan](#), an innovative approach to preservation that will reduce conversion of the region's farmland and rangeland – and associated greenhouse gas emissions – while growing a vibrant local food economy that contributes to our quality of life.

Now adopted by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, the Plan creates a regional policy framework

that improves land use regulation, creates voluntary incentives, supports agricultural economic development, and leverages State and other funding to protect the iconic rural character of Santa Clara Valley.



**Partners: Santa Clara County, University of California Cooperative Extension, Santa Clara County Food Systems Alliance, Santa Clara County Farm Bureau**

## Regional Conservation Investment Strategy

The Authority is the first agency in the state to sponsor a [Regional Conservation Investment Strategy](#), a new conservation planning tool to guide voluntary conservation actions and habitat enhancement for a suite of species and rare communities in the greater Santa Clara County region. As the first in the state, this pilot project will be a model for others statewide.

This tool, like our *Santa Clara Valley Greenprint* and the *Valley Habitat Plan*, demonstrates the Authority's leadership in landscape-scale preservation planning that considers habitat protection, resource management, and wildlife connectivity.

**Partners: Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Santa Clara Valley Water District, Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, California Coastal Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy**

## Planning a better high speed rail

Construction of the California High Speed Rail has the potential to disrupt species and natural resources where the rail is planned to cross southern Santa Clara County, particularly in the Coyote Valley and Pajaro River floodplain.

Open Space Authority staff are working closely with the California High Speed Rail Authority to design alternatives and mitigation opportunities to lessen the effects on wildlife connectivity, natural resources, and agriculture in south Santa Clara County, including in Coyote Valley, the Pajaro River Floodplain, and the Pacheco Pass area.

**Partners: California High Speed Rail Authority, California Strategic Growth Council, The Nature Conservancy, Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency, Peninsula Open Space Trust, Pathways for Wildlife**



View of Coyote Valley and Diablo Range

# Managing for Resilience through Fire and Flood

Five years of dry winters and warm summers left the Santa Clara Valley, like most of California, parched. In Fall 2016, the addition of high winds proved devastating when the Loma Fire raged across the Santa Cruz Mountains, burning 4,475 acres, including Mt. Chual and nearly 2,000 acres of Authority land. During the two weeks the fire raged, our staff worked non-stop with CalFire to identify good locations for fire breaks and opened our staging area at Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve for CalFire equipment and personnel. Also on the preserve, Hidden Lake provided water to fight the fire.

While the Authority's proactive vegetation management helped slow the fire and minimize damage, the landscape was left charred and barren, and we worked closely with a number of agencies on post-fire restoration.

The following February, record-breaking rainfall threatened to erode burned slopes and dump debris and sediment into waterways. We worked with community members to monitor, prevent, and mitigate this damage.

Many species, including some rare plants, have returned to the post-fire landscape, and animals have reclaimed their habitat. And we began a long-term program of monitoring vegetation, wildlife, and water resources.

California has long cycled through periods of drought, wildfire, and flooding. By studying these effects, we are learning how to better manage lands to allow for resilience and adaptation to climate change.



**Partners: Santa Clara County, CalFire, the Watershed Emergency Response Team, Santa Clara Valley Water District, Natural Resources Conservation Service**

# Bringing Nature to Neighborhoods

For residents living in urban areas, getting to open spaces and natural areas – and enjoying the benefits nature offers for health and well-being – can be challenging. This is why the Open Space Authority has several programs to improve access to nature for all of our residents.

Funds for these projects come from our [20% Funding Grant Program](#), the [Measure Q Urban Open Space Grant Program](#), and the new pilot [Measure Q Environmental Education Grant Program](#).

In November 2016, the Authority awarded the first Measure Q Urban Open Space Grants, [providing nearly \\$1.6 million to 15 organizations](#). The Authority also awarded grants to a diverse set of projects and programs in cities within our jurisdiction – Campbell, Milpitas, Morgan Hill, San Jose, and Santa Clara, as well as in urban unincorporated parts of the County.

## Bill's Backyard: Bridge to Nature

After 10 years of planning, a new half-acre outdoor play space at the Children's Discovery Museum gives kids the chance to dig, build, and explore in an outdoor learning environment. This innovative, half-acre urban space gives families a safe place for unstructured play, outdoor education, and nature exploration right in downtown San Jose.

- Grantee: Children's Discovery Museum
- Awarded: \$308,765 from the Measure Q Urban Open Space Grant Program

"Children's Discovery Museum is a recognized leader in the national museum field based on its successful efforts to serve ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged families."

Marilee Jennings, Executive Director, Children's Discovery Museum



Bill's Backyard

Bringing nature to neighborhoods continued...

### Master Gardeners Community Education Center

The UC Master Gardeners of Santa Clara County now have a unique learning environment for people interested in gardening information and education. The Community Education Center opened in August 2017 on a four-acre parcel at Martial Cottle County Park in San Jose. With a native garden, raised beds, a farm stand, and a greenhouse, Master Gardener volunteers are teaching community members of all ages how to grow plants year-round in environmentally sound and regionally appropriate ways.

- Grantee: Friends of Master Gardeners
- Awarded: \$132,353 from the Measure Q Urban Open Space Grant Program

### Environmental education at Guadalupe River Park

Using the outdoors as a classroom, the Guadalupe River Park Conservancy instills a sense of environmental stewardship while teaching standards-based science, engineering, arts, and math lessons. Our Measure Q grant supports their hands-on environmental science programs for Bay Area children, especially those from low-income families.

- Grantee: Guadalupe River Park Conservancy
- Awarded: \$24,987 from the Measure Q Urban Open Space Grant Program

### Santa Clara Community Garden Park

A new park along the San Tomas Aquino Creek Trail in the City of Santa Clara highlights outdoor activities close to the city's urban core. The three-acre neighborhood park and community garden, which broke ground in September 2017, will feature a pollinator garden, playground, and outdoor classroom.

- Grantee: City of Santa Clara
- Awarded: \$425,000 from the Authority's 20% Funding Program



Guadalupe River Park Conservancy



# HIGHLIGHTS OF SOME OF THE MEASURE Q PROJECTS WE FUNDED THIS YEAR:

## Investing in nature with Measure Q funds

Since voters approved [Measure Q](#) in November 2014, it has generated approximately \$7.9 million per year for open space protection and public access in the Santa Clara Valley. The Authority is investing these funds according to the priorities identified in the *Santa Clara Valley Greenprint*.

1

### **Goal: Protect scenic hillsides, open space, wildlife, redwood forest, and farmland**

- 2,995 acres of farmland and future public access protected
- Completed 3 important initiatives that will inform future conservation strategies and action

2

### **Goal: Increase public access to open space and help maintain Authority parks and trails**

- Performed trail and facility improvements of the Authority's open space preserves that enabled over 200,000 visitors to enjoy the outdoors
- Involved 700+ people through various volunteer, land steward, and youth engagement programs

3

### **Goal: Protect precious water resources including creeks, rivers, and streams**

- Restored the 8.5-acre Coyote Valley South Valley Meadow to improve wildlife habitat, groundwater recharge, and flood resilience with a grant from the Santa Clara Valley Water District's (SCVWD) Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program
- Partnered with SCVWD to launch the Coyote Valley Water Resource Enhancement Feasibility Study

4

### **Goal: Create new urban open spaces and environmental education programs**

- Funded over \$1.6 million for Urban Open Space projects through the Measure Q Urban Open Space Grant Program
- Provided Environmental Education programs to nearly 12,000 members of the public
- Launched the pilot Measure Q Environmental Education Grant Program



# Connecting Through Education and Volunteering

Environmental programs led by our passionate [volunteers](#) get people outside – so that they can better understand and connect to nature and their open spaces.

## Outdoor education

Our passionate Open Space Authority staff and volunteer docents led dozens of popular educational activities in our preserves, urban parks, and farms throughout our community.

A growing number of outside programs this year ranged from a walk through stunning wildflower displays on Coyote Ridge to a family-friendly program for the Perseid meteor shower.

New this year, we offered moonlight walks along Coyote Creek, followed by a campfire at the City of San Jose’s Kelley Park.

- Events: 340
- Participants: 11,682



## Volunteers

Volunteers from across the County help the Authority restore open spaces and connect people to nature. Volunteers assist with land stewardship, trail patrol, trail building, interpretive hikes, and much more.

In our biggest volunteer stewardship event ever, a group of 200 enthusiastic freshmen from San Jose’s Harker School spent a day at Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve. The teens pulled invasive plants and maintained trails contributing to the public’s enjoyment of the preserve, which sees over 60,000 visitors annually.

- Active volunteers: more than 700





## A Little Help from our Friends

**M**ore than ever before, our successes this year were made possible in large part due to our community partners. Collaborations and contributions from dozens of agencies, corporations, organizations, and individuals helped the Open Space Authority leverage taxpayer funds to protect, restore, understand, and enjoy our open spaces.

We offer our heartfelt thanks to all of our partners and supporters.

### Partners

Amah Mutsun Tribal Band  
 American Farmland Trust  
 Applied Materials, Inc.  
 Bay Area Open Space Council  
 California Climate Action Network  
 California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
 California High Speed Rail Authority  
 California Strategic Growth Council  
 Conservation Biology, Inc.  
 City of Milpitas  
 City of Morgan Hill  
 City of San Jose  
 City of Santa Clara  
 Committee for Green Foothills

Community Alliance for Family Farmers  
 County of Santa Clara  
 Creekside Science  
 Google, Inc.  
 Greenbelt Alliance  
 Greystone Neighborhood Association  
 Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District  
 Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful  
 Land Trust of Santa Clara Valley  
 Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District  
 National Park Service  
 Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E)

Pajaro River Watershed Flood Prevention Authority  
 Pathways for Wildlife  
 Peninsula Open Space Trust  
 San Francisco Estuary Institute  
 San Jose State University  
 Department of Environmental Sciences  
 Santa Clara County Farm Bureau  
 Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department  
 Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency  
 Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority  
 Santa Clara Valley Water District  
 Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network  
 Santa Teresa Foothills Neighborhood Association  
 Silicon Valley Leadership Group  
 Sustainable Agriculture and Education (SAGE)  
 The Health Trust  
 The Nature Conservancy  
 University of California, Berkeley, Department of Ecosystem Sciences  
 University of California, Berkeley, Lawrence Berkeley Labs  
 University of California, Santa Cruz, Department of Environmental Studies

### Donors

Brian Carr  
 Larry and Patricia Coons  
 Kathleen Hutnik  
 The Julian McPhee family  
 Quicksilver Running Club  
 The Villages Hiking Club  
 Stephen Walker

### Funding partners

California Coastal Conservancy  
 California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
 California Department of Parks and Recreation  
 California Department of Water Resources  
 California Office of Emergency Services/FEMA  
 Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation  
 Pajaro River Watershed Flood Prevention Authority  
 PG&E Corporation Foundation  
 Resources Legacy Foundation  
 Santa Clara Valley Water District  
 S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation  
 The Nature Conservancy  
 U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
 Wildlife Conservation Board

### Coyote Valley Family Harvest Feast sponsors

Bay Area Parent  
 Peninsula Open Space Trust  
 American AgCredit

### Special thanks

Asian Americans for Community Involvement  
 City of Milpitas  
 Garden to Table  
 Happy Hollow Zoo  
 Harker School  
 Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful  
 Milpitas Host Lions Club  
 Sacred Heart Community Services – La Mesa Verde  
 Santa Clara Valley Transit Authority  
 Mayor Rich Tran  
 Veggelution  
 Wildlife Education and Rehabilitation Center



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408-224-7476 • [info@openspaceauthority.org](mailto:info@openspaceauthority.org)

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